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Book Review

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Yuling Pan, Mandy Sha, and Hyunjoo Park. *The Sociolinguistics of Survey Translation*. 2020, New York: Routledge, ISBN 978-1-138-55087-2, 166 pages.

Over the last two decades, there have been increasing amounts of research on survey translation with the goals of: (1) including hard-to-count populations in surveys and (2) increasing comparability and quality of data collected via different language versions of the same survey instrument. In their new book, Pan, Sha and Park illustrate how the field of sociolinguistics can be a useful frame of reference for this type of work.

The book illustrates how to structure the whole survey translation process (design, translation, review and pretesting) in a sociolinguistic framework with the goal of improving survey translation quality. The authors discuss ways in which survey translation is different from other types of translation and propose ways in which the different practitioners involved in the process can work together using this framework. In a nutshell, the authors propose conducting translation at three different levels:

1. At the lexical level, in which the right words are chosen,
2. At the syntactic level in which appropriate use of grammar is the focus, and
3. At the pragmatic level where the social context and communicative effect of the words are considered.

Readers who would benefit from this book include the many actors involved in a survey translation process, such as survey sponsors, survey methodologists, translators, and subject matter experts. Professional translators and bilingual survey methodologists and students of either of these fields would also find this book useful. Finally, the book would serve as a great overview for a survey sponsor who wants to start the translation process of a given survey.

Those who work in the field of survey translation often encounter tensions related to the differing perspectives, goals, constraints and training across the various participants in the process. This book offers a useful conceptual framework to help navigate these issues. It also offers a frame of reference that could bridge the divides that sometimes occur between these groups to help them better work together.

The authors take a deep dive into the complexities involved in survey translation. A fundamental message that emerges is that merely sending a survey to a translator, receiving the translation back and placing the end product directly into the field is not

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enough to ensure that the survey instrument will gather high quality, comparable data across languages. The book includes some technical language from the field of linguistics, and readers who have a basic understanding of those concepts might find the book more useful than others, though the authors do provide definitions for most of the terms they discuss. The book focuses on English as the base language prior to translation, being situated primarily in translation studies in the U.S.

The book is comprised of seven chapters and each one includes discussion questions that could be used in teaching a college or graduate level course. The first two chapters focus on an overview of the role of language in survey translation and an introduction to the field of sociolinguistics, which the authors define as "the study of language use in its social contexts" (page 1). The authors introduce key concepts and theories and provide a brief history of the disciplines of sociolinguistics and survey translation. They delve into the important topic of direct translation versus "adaptation," which can be defined as making modifications to the wording or structure of a question to better fit a different language or cultural group.

The third chapter focuses on questionnaire translation. The focus is on linguistic rules, social practices and cultural norms and the chapter offers a useful conceptualization of why survey translation can be difficult. The chapter talks about common pitfalls in translation, such as how to handle active versus passive voice structures and questions that include complex modifying clauses. The chapter also discusses issues of social practice that can trip up respondents even when accurate and technically correct translations are used. The authors discuss what to do when social practices are different across language and cultural groups. Finally, they talk about cultural norms such as politeness and coherence that may vary across cultures.

Chapter 4 moves into the idea of what the authors call "translation beyond words." Here they delve into issues such as how to handle languages that vary in writing right to left, the type of alphabet or writing system used and languages that have simplified versus traditional forms. This chapter looks at the issue of mode differences in surveys and points to a number of special topics for consideration when translating self-administered internet surveys.

The fifth chapter moves beyond the survey questionnaire itself and discusses the topic of translation of supplementary survey materials of two broad types: (1) survey letters, brochures and other respondent facing materials outside of the questionnaire itself and (2) study materials for use in pretesting translations with respondents. The first part of the chapter gives a nice overview of why "word for word" translation of survey letters often does not achieve the goal of convincing respondents to participate in the survey and provides examples of technically accurate translations that respondents do not interpret as intended due to social or cultural differences. In the end, the authors advocate the idea of a new approach to translation of survey letters, saying that they should be reconstructed using culturally appropriate discourse structures and letter writing styles rather than written and structured exactly like the source version.

The second part of Chapter 5 discusses the different types of research protocols and documents that often need to be translated in preparation for respondent pretesting using methods such as focus groups, cognitive interviews and usability testing. The authors provide a very useful discussion of three challenges that often arise:

1. The need to standardize in surveys,
2. Ensuring that surveys can generate the type of data intended, and
3. Cross-cultural differences in communication norms.

The book offers concrete types of probing questions to use and ways to test these concepts. However, the actual probe wording in other languages is not always included in the book, so bilingual survey methodologist readers who want to improve their methodology based on the authors' recommendations will have to seek the non-English probe wording elsewhere.

Chapter 6 moves past translation methods and focuses on ways to review and improve upon the initial draft version of translated survey instruments. It starts with a discussion of expert review and finishes with a discussion of respondent pretesting. The authors include an important discussion of why review by experts alone is not enough and why respondent testing is also needed. They recommend use of a comprehensive protocol for respondent pretesting but the book itself does not include sample protocols or say where to find examples. Novice readers who would like to implement this method will need to seek example protocols from elsewhere or hire researchers with background/expertise in the respondent translation pretesting field. The authors recommend making adjustments to research protocols based on cultural issues but the book itself does not contain enough information for someone to fully design such a protocol without use of outside resources.

The book includes several appendices. The first contains helpful examples of English language probing questions for use in respondent pretesting. The second contains instructions and a template for use in conducting expert reviews of a translation. A third appendix includes an English language example of an interactive practice session to help respondents understand the pretesting task. The last appendix contains a coding scheme that can be used to analyze issues uncovered in respondent pretesting.

One of the biggest contributions this book makes is providing the reader with an understanding of the reasons why much more work is required after the initial translation process to ensure functional equivalence across different language versions of a survey. It gives the reader an in-depth understanding of the steps to take and the basics of how to do this. However, it does not give enough information as a standalone for an individual translator, bilingual survey methodologist or survey sponsor who is new to this area to fully design and carry out a project of this sort. At the same time, the awareness the book brings could help with project planning, including helping people to plan for enough time and resources to allow for a high quality translation.

A practical question that remains unanswered is what type of practitioner could best implement and oversee a process of survey translation using a sociolinguistic framework in a typical survey organization. The authors state that most translators do not have training to do survey translation in this manner. There are presumably also a limited number of bilingual survey methodologists with a sociolinguistics background or sociolinguists with survey expertise. This type of book might encourage more students and agencies to move in the direction of developing this type of expertise. The book addresses the need for training of the translators and other participants in the process but it leaves unspoken who could best design and conduct such a training and when they should be brought into the process. Should researchers with this expertise run the whole translation

process? Should they be brought in after an initial translation has already been done to oversee expert review and testing? Where can survey sponsors find this type of expertise? These are issues that could use further elaboration.

An additional question that the book mentions, though rather briefly, is the need to document changes made to translations based on adaptation from the original source version of materials. It is often the case that survey questions and materials are used repeatedly in different waves or iterations of a survey and that minor changes are made to the source wording between rounds. It can be difficult to ensure that adaptations made through review and testing are well documented and retained when materials need to be sent to a translator for updates. Detailed recommendations on how to best document and build on this type of work is an issue that remains to be explored.

The final chapter of the book reiterates the authors' useful framework to conceptualize the struggles that often arise during survey translation projects. The survey translation process can involve many practitioners with different backgrounds, who have competing priorities and constraints. Tensions between survey sponsors, translators, survey methodologists, subject matter experts and linguists can be difficult to resolve when each is approaching the process from a different perspective. The authors provide a nice overarching theory that could serve to bridge the gaps between these disparate groups.